



United States
Department of
Agriculture
Forest Service
Rocky Mountain
Region

BIGHORN NATIONAL FOREST

Revised Land and Resource Management Plan



November 2005

**Note to
Readers**

The Forest Service believes reviewers should be given notice of several court rulings related to public participation in the environmental review process. First, reviewers of Draft Environmental Impact Statements must structure their response to the proposal to make clear the reviewer's position and contentions [*Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Corp. v. NRDC*, 435 US 519, 53 (1978)]. In addition, environmental objections that could be raised at the Draft EIS stage but are not raised until after completion of the Final Environmental Impact Statement may be waived or dismissed by the courts [*City of Angoon v. Hodel*, 803F.2d 1016, 1022 (9th Circuit 1986) and *Wisconsin Heritages, Inc. v. Harris*, 490. Supp. 1334, 1338 (E.D. Wis. 1980)].

**Explanation of Acreages
and Data Sources**

The information in the tables, figures and maps in the following document was generated from a variety of sources, including several different Geographical Information System (GIS) software platforms, tabular databases, and data from a variety of models used in planning analysis. The acreage figures from the various sources do not match exactly in all cases. However, when added, acres of National Forest System lands (regardless of the source) are within acceptable margins of error.

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BIGHORN NATIONAL FOREST

Revised Land and Resource Management Plan

Preface

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Understanding the Revised Plan

Background

The term “forest plan” used in this document refers to Forest land and resource management plans in general. The term “1985 Plan” refers to the Bighorn National Forest Plan signed in 1985. The term “Revised Plan” refers to this document.

Forest plans are prepared in accordance with the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974, as amended by the 1976 National Forest Management Act (NFMA), the 1969 National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and other laws and regulations. The Bighorn National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (1985 Plan) was issued in October 1985. NFMA regulations state that a Forest Plan should ordinarily be revised on a 10-year cycle or at least every 15 years (39 CFR 219.10).

The Bighorn National Forest released the Draft Revised Plan and accompanying Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) on July 1, 2004 for a 90-day public comment period. Based on comments received, input from cooperating agencies, and additional analysis, the Bighorn National Forest has prepared this Revised Plan and accompanying Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). The Regional Forester’s Record of Decision explained his rationale for selection of the Revised Plan. This plan has been revised, and the decision made, under the 1982 36 CFR 219 regulations (1982 Planning Rule).

Purpose of the Revised Plan

A forest plan provides guidance for all resource management activities on a national forest.

- ♦ It establishes Forest-wide multiple-use goals and objectives (36 CFR 219.11(b)).
- ♦ It establishes Forest-wide standards and guidelines to fulfill the requirements of 16 USC 1604 applying to future activities and resource integration requirements in 36 CFR 219.13 through 219.27.
- ♦ It establishes management area direction (management area prescriptions) applying to future activities in a management area (resource integration and minimum specific management requirements) 36 CFR 219.11(c).
- ♦ It designates land as suited or not suited for timber production (16 USC 1604(k)) and other resource management activities such as rangeland and recreation management (36 CFR 219.14, 219.15, 219.20, and 219.21). In addition, it identifies lands available for oil and gas leasing and the associated leasing stipulations (36 CFR 228.102).
- ♦ It establishes monitoring and evaluation requirements (36 CFR 219.11(d)).
- ♦ It recommends the establishment of wilderness, wild and scenic rivers, and other special designations to Congress, as appropriate.

P R E F A C E

Forest plans estimate future management activities, but the actual amount of activities accomplished is determined by annual budgets and site-specific project decisions. Because budgets rarely provide enough money to fully implement a forest plan, scheduled activities and actions must be adjusted to match available funds and Congressional intent of appropriations acts. While budget changes do not require forest plan amendments, the implications of the changes may require the agency to evaluate the need for amendments.

Relationship of the Revised Plan to Other Documents

Alternatives are described and effects analyzed in the FEIS. The Revised Plan gives the technical direction for implementing Alternative D-FEIS, the preferred alternative identified in the Record of Decision (ROD).

Management direction in the Forest Service Directive System, including the Forest Service Manual (FSM) and Forest Service Handbook (FSH) applies to Bighorn National Forest projects, and some FSM and FSH direction is referenced in the Revised Plan. The Manuals and Handbooks are available on the internet at:

<http://www.fs.fed.us/publications/>. Management direction also includes applicable laws, regulations and policies. This direction must be complied with, as applicable.

Forest plan direction is implemented with the most site-specific direction superceding the more general direction. For example, a management area standard for rotation ages supercedes a Forest-wide standard for rotation ages. Project level deviations from plan direction must be documented in a plan amendment or revision, or, in the case of deviations from guidelines, in the appropriate National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) decision document.

Reader's Guide to the Revised Plan

This document contains the Preface, the Revised Plan, and appendices. Accompanying the Revised Plan is the ROD, FEIS, FEIS appendices, Executive Summary, and a map package.

The Preface provides background information, describes how the Revised Plan would be implemented through project decision-making, and discusses Forest Plan amendment and revision procedures.

The Revised Plan describes management direction for the Forest. Chapter 1 direction applies Forestwide and includes goals, objectives, strategies, and Forestwide standards and guidelines. Chapter 2 contains the management area prescription standards and guidelines. Chapter 3 describes the geographic areas. Chapter 4 discusses the monitoring and evaluation process.

The appendices contain detailed information to aid in understanding and implementing the Revised Plan:

- ♦ Appendix A – Implementation

- ♦ Appendix B – Oil and Gas Leasing Stipulations
- ♦ Appendix C – Emphasis Species

The Selected Alternative

The Revised Plan and FEIS are the result of extensive public involvement and analysis. The FEIS identified Alternative D-FEIS as the preferred alternative. The actual selection by the Regional Forester of alternative D-FEIS as the Revised Plan, and his rationale for that selection, is shown in the ROD.

Implementation of the Forest Plan

A forest plan provides the framework to guide the day-to-day land and resource management operations of a National Forest. The plan's goals, objectives, standards and guidelines are used to guide the identification and selection of potential projects. Other guidance is summarized in Appendices A, B, and C.

The forest plan is a strategic programmatic document that does not make project level decisions nor does it make any irreversible or irretrievable commitments of resources. Those decisions are made after more detailed, site-specific analysis and further public comment as part of the site-specific NEPA process.

NFMA requires that resource plans and permits, contracts, and other instruments issued for the use and occupancy of National Forest System lands be consistent with the forest plan. The following are some examples of project decisions that require more detailed environmental analysis:

- ♦ Timber harvesting and related activities, such as slash disposal and road construction.
- ♦ Grazing allotment management plans.
- ♦ Fish or wildlife habitat improvement projects.
- ♦ Watershed improvement projects.
- ♦ Developed recreation reconstruction projects or trail construction projects.
- ♦ Decisions for winter sports development, outfitter/guide proposals, and other externally generated projects involving use and occupancy of National Forest System lands.

Resource inventories, actions plans, and schedules are not binding decisions and do not require additional environmental analysis at the project level.

Public involvement will be a key part of implementing the revised forest plan. Annual monitoring and evaluation reports will be available for public review.

P R E F A C E

Valid Outstanding Rights

The Revised Plan was prepared with the understanding that individuals and entities may have established valid rights, unknown to the Forest Service at this time, to occupy and use National Forest System lands under laws and authorities established by Congress. The courts have established that such valid outstanding rights may be subject to some federal regulation. See *Sierra Club v. Hodel*, 848 F. 2d. 1068 (10th Circuit, 1988). This plan recognizes that such valid outstanding rights may exist and the Forest Service will honor such valid outstanding rights when it is subsequently determined that the specific facts surrounding any claim to such rights meet the criteria set forth in any respective statute granting such occupancy and use. Upon discovery of such valid outstanding rights, amendment or revision of the Revised Plan may be necessary.

Resource plans and permits, contracts, cooperative agreements, and other instruments issued for the occupancy and use of National Forest System lands must be consistent with the Revised Plan, subject to valid existing rights.

Draft Rules and Policies

The Revised Plan and FEIS do not incorporate draft rules, regulations, or policies. The documents have been prepared using scientifically based processes and analysis to best comply with existing laws and agency direction. As new regulations or policies are developed during implementation of this Revised Plan, activities on the forest will be modified, if necessary, to comply with these regulations.

Public Involvement and Coordination with Other Government Agencies

Public involvement entails more than merely soliciting public comment on proposed actions through the scoping process. Throughout the forest plan revision process, we have been committed to an intensive program of public involvement. In addition, ongoing public involvement and governmental coordination will be a central part of implementing the forest plan.

The Forest will continue to develop both new and existing collaborative efforts, including public review and participation in monitoring and evaluation.

To receive more information about project planning and collaboration opportunities, please write or visit: Bighorn National Forest, 2013 Eastside Second St., Sheridan, WY 82801. The telephone number is (307) 674-2600.

Most planning information is available on the internet. Information about the Bighorn National Forest, as well as links to an online version of the Revised Forest Plan and FEIS, can be found on our web page. The web page address is:

<http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/bighorn/>

Forest Plan Amendment and Revision

Forest Plan Amendment – During plan implementation, evaluation of monitoring results may reveal that the Revised Plan needs to be changed. Changes are made by amending the plan (36 CFR 219.10(f)).

Forest Plan Revision – The Forest Supervisor is required to review the conditions of the land at least every five years to determine if a revision is necessary. If monitoring and evaluation indicate that immediate changes in the forest plan are needed and the changes can't be handled in an amendment, plan revision becomes necessary. The Regional Forester is the official responsible for reviewing and approving forest plan revisions.

Understanding the Bighorn National Forest

The Bighorn National Forest is located in north central Wyoming's Big Horn Mountain range. The gross area within the proclaimed Forest boundary contains 1,115,161 acres which includes 7,491 acres of State and private land.

The Forest is located approximately midway between Yellowstone and Mount Rushmore National Parks. Three highways, classified as Scenic Byways, cross the mountains. The Forest offers year-round recreation opportunities. In addition, it administers over 500 special use permits including communication sites, reservoirs, easements, power lines, outfitter guides, campground concession operations and lodges/resorts. More than 28,000 cattle and 21,000 sheep graze on the National Forest under special use permit. Through the end of 2000, after fifteen years of implementation, the Forest has offered approximately 131 million board feet of timber and firewood.

The Bighorn National Forest is subdivided into 3 administrative units, known as Ranger Districts, with offices located in Sheridan, Buffalo and Lovell, Wyoming. The Forest Supervisor's Office is co-located with the District Office in Sheridan.

Physical Environment

The Big Horn Mountains are an isolated range rising from rolling plains country which is approximately 4,000 feet in elevation. The mountains rise to an elevation of 13,175 feet above sea level at the summit of Cloud Peak. The ruggedly glaciated, barren granite peaks slope off to the more gently rolling, timbered ridges and drainages that constitute the bulk of the Big Horn mountains. Here the terrain is almost plateau-like, ranging in elevation from approximately 7,000 to 9,000 feet. At the Forest boundary, the terrain drops off suddenly to the surrounding plains and rolling foothills.

All of the watersheds originating on the Forest drain into the Yellowstone River through the Big Horn, Tongue, and Powder Rivers. The Yellowstone is part of the Missouri River Basin system.

P R E F A C E

The precipitation patterns of the Big Horn Mountains are similar to those throughout the Rocky Mountains. The growing season is from mid-May through August. Five to six inches of precipitation falls during this season, most of it as showers at the beginning of the growing season or as snow at the end of the growing season. The average frost-free period is from about June 15 to August 20. Winters are long and cold and last from October 15 through April. At elevations above 9,000 feet, however, snowstorms and frost can occur at any time during the summer months.

Biological Environment

The Bighorn National Forest has about 728,000 acres of forested land, amounting to approximately 65% of the Forest. Principle species include lodgepole pine, Engelmann spruce and subalpine fir. Ponderosa pine, limber pine and Douglas-fir are found at the lower elevations. Non-forested lands include grassy meadows, shrub lands, alpine tundra, and rocky areas.

The Forest provides important and unique plant and animal habitat similar to other mountain ranges within the Rocky Mountain region. Rare species, including the Forest Service sensitive Yellowstone cutthroat trout, water vole, pine marten, bats, amphibians, and other species are associated with the Forest. Mule deer, elk, moose, black bear, and mountain lions are also present and provide excellent viewing and hunting opportunities on the Forest. Numerous streams and lakes provide sport fisheries stocked with rainbow trout, brook trout, and brown trout. Currently, Canada lynx are not known to occur on the Forest.

Social and Economic Environment

Big Horn, Johnson, Sheridan, and Washakie counties contain the entirety of the Forest. The Forest represents a substantial portion of the four counties ranging from less than five percent in Washakie County to almost twenty-five percent for Sheridan County. In addition to employment, the Bighorn National Forest provides commodities, recreation, and scenic opportunities for the residents of the four counties.

All four counties have experienced population shifts, but the timing has not been uniform across the counties, mainly because they have different economic bases which have flourished or suffered in different periods. The counties all have relatively old populations, with a median age of nearly 40, and low numbers particularly in the 20-24 age group. None have much ethnic diversity (Blevins and Jensen, 2002).

The Forest provides a wide variety of recreational activities, which play a role in the social and economic environment of local communities. Timber harvest has been a historic use on the Forest since the 1890s. Livestock grazing on summer pastures in the Big Horn Mountains has been important since settlers first moved to the area, and continues to contribute to the culture and custom of local communities. Jobs and income generated from recreation and tourism, timber harvest, and livestock grazing contribute to the economies of local communities.